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India: Incidence of forged driver's licences and authentic driver's licences obtained by fraudulent means; the security measures integrated into driver's licences (2003 - 2005)

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Forged Driver's Licences

A survey of news articles revealed that Indian police uncovered numerous forged driver's licences production operations for the period 2003 to 2005 (*The Hindu* 31 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 21 Feb. 2005; *The Times of India* 29 Apr. 2005; *Hindustan Times* 28 Apr. 2005; *ibid.* 30 Jan. 2005). According to a resident of Punjab state who has worked as a truck driver for over 35 years, "one can easily procure a driving licence [in Punjab]" (*The Telegraph* 23 May 2004).

Forged driver's licences have been used for a number of reasons in India, including to conceal the identity of Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (*Hindustan Times* 7 Mar. 2005) and Babbar Khalsa (*ibid.* 1 June 2005; *The Statesman* 2 June 2005) militants, to open a bank account (*ibid.* 4 June 2004), to prepare false sureties to bail out an individual accused before a court (*The Times of India* 29 Apr. 2005; *Hindustan Times* 28 Apr. 2005) and to buy cellular phone cards (*ibid.* 11 Apr. 2003).

Media reports also revealed that forged driver's licences were confiscated by police in a number of locations in India: Chennai (*The Hindu* 21 Feb. 2005; *The Times of India* 14 July 2004), Calcutta (*The Statesman* 4 June 2004), Lucknow (*Hindustan Times* 28 Apr. 2005; *The Times of India* 29 Apr. 2005), Inderpuri (*The Statesman* 2 June 2005; *Hindustan Times* 1 June 2005), Patna (*The Times of India* 11 Feb. 2005), Delhi (*Hindustan Times* 30 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 11 Apr. 2003; *ibid.* 7 Mar. 2005; *The Hindu* 31 Jan. 2005) and New Delhi (*The Tribune* 8 June 2005). According to officials at the Regional Transport Office in Chennai, which was allegedly implicated in a forged driver's licence scheme, "it is very difficult even for [a] law enforcement agency like [the] police to differentiate between those 'procured' licences and the original ones that we issue" (*The Times of India* 14 July 2004).

Authentic Driver's Licences Obtained by Fraudulent Means

No information on authentic driver's licences obtained by fraudulent means could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Security Measures Integrated into Driver's Licences

The 1988 Motor Vehicles Act states that the central government determines the form and content of driver's licences (India 1988). The 1989 Central Motor Vehicles Act outlines that "every driving licence issued or renewed by a licensing authority shall be in Form 6" (*ibid.* 1989), and "where the licensing authority has the necessary apparatus,...the issue of a laminated card type or Smart Card type driving licence [will be done using] Form 7" (*ibid.*).

The Indian government adopted the Smart Card Operating System for Transport Applications (SCOSTA) as the national standard format for driver's licences and vehicle registration (India n.d.a; *Asia Times Online* 2 Oct. 2004; IITK n.d.), with one of the purposes being to standardize and secure the information of the Department of Transport (*ibid.*).

Although smart cards can serve many purposes (*Asia Times Online* 2 Oct. 2004), in this case they are "a [driver's] licence, registration and insurance document rolled into one" (*Hindustan Times* 7 Jan. 2005). The Website of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, the organization that developed SCOSTA, states that smart cards "are secured electronic devices that are used for keeping data and other information in a way that only 'authorized' users are permitted to see or write the data" (IITK n.d.). In addition, "the application specifications...include secure key management systems that ensure...that only officials authorized to change the card data can do so and that it is not possible to create forged ... cards" (*ibid.*). However, Privacy International, "a human rights group formed in 1990 as a watchdog on surveillance and privacy invasions by governments and corporations" (PI n.d.), warns that the creation of forged smart cards is possible (*Asia Times Online* 2 Oct. 2004).

Capable of storing up to eight megabytes of data (Asia Pulse 14 Sept. 2005), smart cards have a small gold plate about 0.5 inches (1.3 centimetres) in diameter on the front of the card, which, when inserted into a smart card reader, makes contact with electrical connectors that allow for the transfer of the data to and from the card via the reader (*The Tribune* 22 Oct. 2001). These smart cards store vehicle registration data, as well as data on the owner of the vehicle, while cardholder information is printed on the front the card (AFX Asia 4 Apr. 2005).

New Delhi and Gujarat (ibid.) state governments have already introduced smart card-based driver's licences and vehicle registration (*Asia Times Online* 2 Oct. 2004; *Frontline* 2005). All smart card-based driver's licences issued in different states are to be SCOSTA compliant (India n.d.a). However, one news article reported that some of the smart cards already issued in India fail to comply with the original basic guidelines for the cards (*Frontline* 2005).

According to the Website of Delhi state government, driver's licences that are not of the smart card type are laminated and contain a photograph of the cardholder (India n.d.b). Further information on the physical characteristics and security measures of non-smart card type licences could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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